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Board of Trustees pass resolution on black student demands

Joel P. Smith

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DENISON UNIVERSITY



GRANVILLE, OHIO 43023

Founded 1831

AREA CODE 614
582-9181

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

February 28, 1970

To: Denison Alumni, Parents and Friends

The Denison Board of Trustees held a special meeting on Friday, February 20 to review the situation which resulted from the issuance of "Black Student Demands" on December 19 and the various responses to those demands.

I am enclosing a copy of the statement unanimously adopted by the Board at that meeting. It summarizes much of what has happened and sets forth principles which will guide the College as we work toward a constructive resolution of the difficult issues we face.

As we move ahead, we shall be eager to keep you informed of our program and to have your questions and comments, so that we may be confident of your understanding and of your support.

With best wishes.

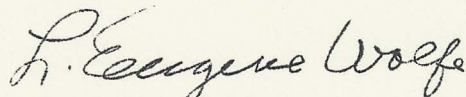
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Joel P. Smith", with a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Joel P. Smith
President

February 23, 1970

This statement is sent to you at the request of
the Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "L. Eugene Wolfe". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

L. Eugene Wolfe,
Secretary of the Board

STATEMENT BY THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF DENISON UNIVERSITY

The mission of Denison University is to provide an excellent education in the liberal arts and sciences for qualified students of all races, creeds, and colors. In pursuit of this general objective, we recognize that a special set of problems faces a minority group on any campus and that specific actions may be required to provide such a minority with an opportunity to enjoy a balanced and fulfilling academic and social experience while at Denison.

On May 31, 1968, this Board adopted a resolution which included the following:

"The Board of Trustees agrees with the Students, Faculty and Administration that Denison University should take affirmative steps to improve opportunities for larger numbers of Negro students to contribute to the life of the University."

That resolution was based upon the belief, which we still hold, that the quality of our programs can be enhanced by the inclusion of black people in this educational community.

Affirmative steps toward the end contemplated by the above resolution have in fact been taken, both before the resolution and more vigorously since. There is room for difference of opinion as to whether specific measures have been wise or unwise, effective or ineffective, or whether the over-all effort has been adequate or inadequate. Such differences should be discussed, however, on the basis of the facts as to what has been done.

On December 19, 1969, an organization of Denison students issued a document entitled "Black Student Union Demands." The question of what actions to take in response to these demands has occupied the attention of many people for many weeks. In view of the importance of the matter, the Board of Trustees held a special meeting on February 20, 1970 to review the situation created by the demands, the manner in which they have been dealt with and some of the questions which we understand are currently being considered.

Before the meeting a number of trustees conferred with the Task Force created by the Faculty for purposes referred to below. The discussion was frank, wide-ranging, and informative; the representatives of the Board who were present made a report to the Board. Representatives of the Black Student Union were also invited to meet with some of the trustees, but they declined.

After full discussion with the Board we think it right to make the following observations regarding the general situation and some of the principles which in our view should govern the resolution of the issues now before the College.

I.

As to the demands themselves and the way in which they have been approached, we make the following general comments.

1. It does not seem to us that the issuance of demands, especially when they are strident in tone and extreme in substance, is the way to work toward change within an educational institution. Such a procedure may have the effect of inhibiting careful consideration of important questions.

2. In response to these demands a resolution was approved by the Faculty on January 26, 1970, upon recommendation of the Executive Committee of the Faculty which includes the President and other principal officers of the College. This resolution reads as follows:

"RESOLVED, we hereby endorse the demands of the Black Students with the intention of implementation. It is understood that some specific points may be reformulated during the discussion which will be part of the process of implementation. The details of particular major changes, such as a revision of the financial aid policy or creation of an Afro-American studies department, will be reported to the faculty for subsequent action."

3. In view of the importance and complexity of the issues raised, the haste with which the demands were endorsed with a commitment to "implementation," subject only to rather undefined reservations, seems to have been more responsive to the emotions of the moment than to a careful analysis of the implications of all of the demands for the College as a whole.

4. A danger presented by the resolution is that it may be read as making promises that cannot be kept without sacrificing the best interests of the College. Such a result would intensify rather than relieve polarization.

5. A Task Force has been formed by the Faculty to make recommendations for specific courses of action. We are encouraged to think that this group will deal with the issues before it in a careful and thoughtful way and will consider them in the interests of the College as a whole. We look forward to receiving specific proposals as soon as they have been developed; the Board commits itself to prompt consideration of the recommendations.

II.

The Board believes that the job of the Task Force will be facilitated by our stating at this time certain general propositions which will guide us in considering these matters further. In this way, we hope to avoid a situation in which misunderstandings or misconceptions lead to a conflict between the Board and the Administration, Faculty or Student Body.

A. BASIC OBJECTIVE

Denison's aim is to provide undergraduate educational programs of high quality. This aim governs the selection of faculty, the selection of students, the development of curriculum, the establishment and operation of departments of instruction, and the working out of administrative organization and processes.

B. APPOINTMENT AND COMPENSATION OF FACULTY

1. We believe that Denison would be improved by the addition of qualified black scholars to the faculty. This is important for many reasons, including the desirability of having more faculty members who can work effectively with black students. We do not believe, however, that this objective can be translated into a numerical target, particularly when such a target is not based on a realistic assessment of the likelihood that it can

be achieved. No college can be any better than its faculty, and we would find it necessary to oppose any proposal regarding the principal criteria for appointment that substituted a simple racial test for the careful evaluation of each candidate's training and scholarly competence, his ability to teach his subject and his ability to contribute to the over-all quality of undergraduate education at Denison.

2. We believe that the President and the Faculty must retain the responsibility, subject to final review by the Board of Trustees, for evaluating the qualifications of all individuals proposed for appointment to the Denison Faculty. This is not to say that selection should be made without regard to views of students. In particular, students can often contribute to faculty recruitment by helping determine how well candidates for appointment are likely to relate to various groups within the College. We do not think it proper, however, for any group of students (whether chosen on a racial basis or in some other manner) to have either in fact or in name the power to veto the appointment or advancement of any faculty member.

3. In determining the compensation of faculty members Denison must continue to seek to achieve equity among individuals with equivalent rank and accomplishments. We would not be able to approve salary arrangements that resulted in significant differentials related positively or negatively to race.

C. SELECTION AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF STUDENTS

1. One of the characteristics of Denison has been the high quality of its student body and we should work to maintain and improve this high quality. In deciding which applicants to admit it is essential for the Admissions Office to concern itself with the qualifications of each individual applicant. These qualifications must include a desire, as well as potential ability, to achieve the kind of educational experience that Denison seeks to provide. It is also right for consideration to be given to the composition of the class because diversity is important to the educational quality of the College. We do not believe, however, that the establishment of a racial quota is the way to approach the problem of achieving a desirable diversity within the Denison student body. Nor do we believe that concern for the size of any group within the student body should lead to inadequate consideration of the qualifications of individual applicants within and without that group.

2. Final responsibility for admissions decisions regarding all applicants must continue to rest with the Director of Admissions and the Faculty Committee on Admissions. We cannot accept any procedure which would give authority for decisions regarding the admission of persons from any ethnic group to a screening committee whose membership was itself determined by a racial test.

3. Regarding financial aid, we continue to believe that every effort must be made to provide scholarships or other forms of financial assistance to as many needy and well qualified students of all races as is possible, within the limitations of our resources. We reject categorically, however, the idea that members of any ethnic group should receive only gift aid while other students with demonstrated qualifications and need are expected to meet part of their expenses by working during termtime or by borrowing. In considering financial aid policies, we also think it important to review carefully the question whether proposed allocations of funds available for student aid may result in inequities in terms of the qualifications, as well as the needs, of various applicants.

D. CURRICULUM AND DEPARTMENTAL MATTERS

1. The Board relies upon the Faculty and upon the Administration to work out matters of curriculum and departmental organization, subject to review by the Board. It is important that we be confident that such matters are considered according to appropriate educational and academic standards. That confidence would be diminished if programs were developed in response to pressures of the moment, rather than on the basis of thoughtful planning and considered judgment.

2. In this context, we must express concern about a commitment to an Afro-American Studies Department in the absence of any plan as to the composition and structure of the department or the academic program it would be intended to present. It is not our responsibility to develop such a plan, but we believe that detailed planning must precede a decision to create a department and should significantly affect the decision.

E. FINANCIAL LIMITATIONS AND THE QUALITY OF THE COLLEGE

1. The resources of the College are severely limited. Indeed, like most private colleges and universities, Denison is facing financial problems which are more acute than they have been for many years. In an attempt to avoid unacceptable deficits, Denison's tuition was increased by \$300 this year and it will be increased by another \$200 next year. Despite these increases, it will be difficult to balance the budget this year and our projections indicate substantial deficits in the next several years. These projections assume stringent limitations on increases in operating costs. It must be stated clearly and directly that we are not now able to say how Denison is to meet the financial obligations associated with present commitments. We point this out not to frighten or discourage anyone but simply to call attention to an aspect of our situation that must be taken into account.

2. Because of our financial limitations any new proposal for faculty recruitment, student aid or curricular development, to be considered by the Board, should contain an explicit analysis of costs and specific proposals for meeting these costs. We are not asserting that everything that the College is doing now is of higher priority than anything else the College might do; we are insisting that the question of alternative uses of resources be confronted directly at the time that new proposals are put forward and that such proposals be evaluated both in terms of what they can contribute to the College and in terms of what their adoption would force us to give up.

3. In considering alternative uses of funds, we are committed to maintaining — indeed enhancing to the extent possible — the quality of this College, now and into the future. Thus, we would have difficulty accepting proposals to finance new activities by holding down the salaries of Faculty and Staff, even if present members of the Faculty and Staff were to propose such sacrifices.

* * *

We wish to end this statement by emphasizing once again that we believe that the opportunities at Denison for black students to study and live can be and will be improved. This will only happen, however, if all of us who care about this College approach the task of developing a strong program for black students in a thoughtful and realistic, as well as committed, spirit.

Granville, Ohio
February 20, 1970